

COVERT C.I.A. ACTS CALLED OVERUSED

But Hilsman Sees the Tactic
as a Justifiable Option

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Roger Hilsman, a high State Department official in the Kennedy Administration, writes in a forthcoming book that covert action by the Central Intelligence Agency has been "overused as an instrument of foreign policy."

Mr. Hilsman, who is now a professor in the School of International Studies at Columbia University, was director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research from February, 1961, until May, 1963. He then served as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs until March, 1964.

In his book, "To Move a Nation," soon to be published by Doubleday & Co., Mr. Hilsman writes that he agrees with Allen W. Dulles, former Director of Central Intelligence, that national security requires and justifies covert operations by the C.I.A.

By covert operations, Mr. Hilsman includes both clandestine intelligence-gathering activities, whether by conventional espionage or photographic reconnaissance by U-2 planes, and political activities, such as financing an anti-Communist labor union abroad or even overthrowing a Communist or pro-Communist regime.

The trouble, Mr. Hilsman says, is that too often there has been resort to covert operations without considering whether they were effective and appropriate in a particular situation and whether there was not a more effective and appropriate alternative available.

Iran and Cuba

Thus, he writes, it was one thing to instigate and carry through a coup in Iran against Premier Mohammed Mossadegh and his Communist allies, but quite another to launch a 1,000-man invasion of Cuba when there was no effective internal opposition to Premier Castro.

Again, he says, it was one thing for the C.I.A. to "give a covert boost" to Ramon Mag-saysay in the Philippines, who was "a natural leader with a wide popular support" in his fight against the Communist Hukbalahaps, and quite a different thing to try by covert means to "create a Mag-saysay," as the intelligence agency tried to do with the unpopular and ineffective King Norasavan in Laos.

By the end of the Eisenhower Administration, Mr. Hilsman writes, covert political action had become "a fad," until United States agents abroad were as "ubiquitously busy" as Communist agents.

The upshot was, he says, that while one covert action uncovered might be "plausibly deniable," several hundred were not, and the cumulative effect was to tarnish the American image.

"Too heavy reliance on the techniques of secret intelligence," Mr. Hilsman states, "so corroded one of our major political assets, the belief in American intentions and integrity, as to nullify much of the gain."

Blames Top Officials

Mr. Hilsman does not put the blame for this situation so much on the intelligence agency as he does on the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, "who were fundamentally responsible for making covert action a fad, and . . . who can at least prevent secrecy and deception from coming to defeat policy."

The basic trouble with the intelligence agency, both under the Eisenhower Administration and to a somewhat lesser degree under President Kennedy, Mr. Hilsman believes, was "that the agency was simply too powerful for the narrow function for which it was responsible."

"It combined in one organization," he continues, "just too many of the resources and instruments of foreign policy — the means to gather information in its agents abroad; the means to analyze information and develop policies and proposals in its research and analysis sections in Washington, and the means to implement policy with a whole range of instrumentalities, including C.I.A. station chiefs with their capacity for high-level representation."

Solution Offered

The ideal solution for the problems created by an agency furnished with hundreds of millions of dollars annually, endowed with perhaps a surplus of expert manpower and shielded by necessary secrecy, Mr. Hilsman believes, was to follow the British example and put the research and analysis functions in one organization and the intelligence-gathering and clandestine political activities in another, which would be under close supervision and control of the State Department.

But such a drastic move would have required legislation, and Mr. Hilsman concedes that the Central Intelligence Agency, reinforced by its "natural" allies in the coalition of Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans on the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, would have defeated it.

Therefore, he recommends a more modest revision of the agency's role along these lines:

1. Continue the reduction in covert operations begun under the Kennedy Administration, with the aim of holding them down to those that are effective, appropriate and without better alternatives.
2. Concentrate clandestine intelligence gathering operations "on matters of true threat to the nation," and improve the quality of the intelligence collection.